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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

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August 21, 1991

UNCLASSIFIED MEMO WITH SECRET/NOFORN ATTACHMENTS

MEMORANDUM TO: ALL CHINA LIGHT RECIPIENTS
FROM: INR/EAP - Thomas Fingar *TF*
SUBJECT: Correction Of August 21, 1991 "CHINA LIGHTS"

The attached are corrected pages of the INR "China Lights" distributed on August 21, 1991.

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CHINA/USSR: GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR HARD-LINERS

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After months of watching the world's only other socialist power crumble, China's leaders see both hope and danger in the anti-Gorbachev coup. Whatever the outcome, the Soviet crisis will worsen Chinese succession tensions.

Chinese leaders have long viewed Gorbachev's openings to multiparty politics, ethnic and republican autonomy, unrestrained public expression, cooperation with the West, and privatization of state enterprises as serious threats to their own shaky legitimacy. More recently, [REDACTED] Gorbachev's kowtowing to the G7, and the focus on "democratic socialism" at the CPSU Central Committee plenum have heightened Chinese fears.

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New lease on socialist life? The Moscow coup has opened new possibilities for Beijing's hard-liners. Through the first two days, Beijing has maintained a muted public response. A foreign ministry statement emphasized PRC opposition to external "interference" in Soviet "internal affairs" and called for "unimpeded growth" in Sino-Soviet relations. Chinese media, under tight restraints, reported events straightforwardly, without comment. By reporting that a trade union delegation left for Moscow as scheduled on August 19, Chinese authorities projected a business-as-usual atmosphere.

Between the lines, though, the pleasure of Beijing leaders in the course of events in Moscow was evident in the quickness, quantity and fait accompli cast of Chinese coverage of the coup. [REDACTED] senior PLA officers "are comfortable" with, and even gloating over, Moscow developments, seeing a victory for communism and a setback in the US quest for "supremacy" in the new world order.

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[REDACTED] Soviet relations with the West would deteriorate if the coup succeeds. But Chinese diplomatic and foreign policy analysts also emphasize that the situation is fluid and the new regime would face the same intractable domestic problems that frustrated Gorbachev.

Leadership calculus. The playing out of the Soviet crisis will have a major impact on the Chinese succession struggle, which again is heating up. Even before the Moscow coup, prospects for the USSR had become increasingly important to the Chinese political equation. Whatever political deals had been worked out in Beijing in anticipation of a scheduled September party plenum may be now open to renegotiation. Immediate political risks and opportunities, not longer-term national interests, will dictate reactions. If faced with a lengthy or bloody crisis in Moscow, PRC leaders will be forced to concentrate on squelching rumors and unrest in Beijing and to delay major party decisions.

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Beijing hard-liners will be cheering for the new Soviet regime to impose order along the lines of the post-Tiananmen "Chinese model." Such an outcome would justify their own recentralizing bent and help them consolidate power through personnel decisions now being worked out for both the party plenum and a party congress in late 1992. To build political pressure on opponents, they would step up polemics against "democratic socialism" and "bourgeois liberalism." Backers of Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, whose program parallels Gorbachev's original reform tacks, would see their latest and already faltering attempts to regain momentum set aside. Should the coup attempt fail and Yeltsin and other reformers emerge victorious, it is far from certain that reformers in China would benefit in the short run. Beijing would probably return to the bunker mentality evident after the Romanian revolution, papering over differences in the name of regime survival. (CHamrin/JHuskey) (SECRET/NOFORN)